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Review by **Mark Rice**, Minnesota State University, Mankato

In terms of historiography, study of the first Strategic Arms Limitation Talks/Treaty (SALT I) has been limited. The topic's listing in the most recent "American Foreign Policy: A Guide to the Literature" consists of but eight entries, well overshadowed by its more controversial successor, SALT II.[1] Because of its place in the history of Cold War arms control – in the midst of détente, paralleled by the CSCE/MBFR negotiations that produced the Helsinki Accords and Conventional Forces in Europe treaty, followed by the unsuccessful SALT II and the successful INF and START treaties – it is not all that surprising that SALT I has been largely unstudied, and that most of that work occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, the inclusion of a dedicated Foreign Relations of the United States volume on SALT I is a welcome addition for historians examining the foreign policy of the Nixon administration, especially topics related to détente and the developing arms control regime.

The volume starts on virtually the same day as the start of the Nixon administration, with the new president's press conference that included his openness to starting up the arms control negotiations that had been discussed under the prior administration. American officials, including the military, wanted to go forward on SALT because there was a concern that the Soviet Union was catching up to the United States, not only in terms of the quantity

[1] The notable books on SALT include John Newhouse, *Cold Dawn: The Story of SALT* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973); Mason Willrich and John B. Rhinelander, *SALT: The Moscow Agreements and Beyond* (New York: Free Press, 1974); Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979); Thomas W. Wolfe, *The SALT Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Pub. Co., 1979); Gerard C. Smith, *Doubletalk: The Story of the First Strategic Arms Limitations Talks* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980); Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1994); and Gerard C. Smith, *Disarming Diplomat: The Memoirs of Gerard C. Smith, Arms Control Negotiator* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1996).

of strategic arms, but also the quality (developing multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicles (MIRVs), expanding ICMB mobility, etc.) (2-3). Nixon was reluctant, at least publicly, because of his ideas about the linkage between arms control and other areas of confrontation Middle East, Vietnam, etc.), but was not willing to let those linkages slow arms control and détente too much (7). The administration sought a June/July start for the talks, and preparations on the U.S. position started almost immediately in February 1969.

As it was, the talks did not begin until that fall. In the meantime, much of the discussion leading up to the first talks centered around the question of a moratorium on MIRV testing along with a moratorium on missile deployment during the duration of the talks. While Gerard Smith, the head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the chief negotiator, supported these ideas, the Joint Chiefs and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger opposed them, fearing that the former would become a permanent ban on MIRVs that would undermine a crucial American advantage, and that such a ban was unverifiable. As it turned out, however, the initial talks largely ignored MIRV issues, focusing instead on anti-ballistic missile (ABM) issues, particularly the question of limiting or eliminating ABM from both sides, ensuring strategic stability. By March 1970, a proposal to allow limited ABM systems (around capitals and select missile sites) while not banning MIRVs was beginning to gain ground on the American side (204).

When negotiations reopened in April, it seemed as though the two sides were not far apart on ABM/MIRV issues (with the Soviets willing to accept limited ABM and continued MIRV development), but differences on levels and definitions of strategic weapons limited efforts to reach agreement. As talks continued, it was becoming increasingly apparent that agreements on limited aspects of the issues, especially ABMs, would be more possible than an agreement that tried, and failed, to cover all aspects of the negotiations (265-67). By July, Soviet Ambassador to Washington Anatoly Dobrynin indicated to Kissinger through their developing backchannel that the Soviets would be willing to accept a limited ABM agreement, tied to an agreement on accidental or "third party" nuclear war (300). The Americans, though, were still looking for a larger, more comprehensive agreement that included limitations in overall strategic weapons (308)l

Still, as the third session opened in the fall of 1970, the talks seemed to be in deadlock. The Soviets seemed more concerned with "third party" attacks and "forward based systems" (U.S. nuclear-armed aircraft in Europe), which frustrated the U.S. officials looking for movement on general strategic restrictions (366-71) It was only in January and February 1971 that progress on ABM issues seemed to open the door to optimism for the March session, and Nixon and Kissinger communicated to the Soviets about the close positions on ABM, MIRV, and the duration of the agreement. By May, an agreement on ABM and a freeze on large offensive weapons systems seemed to be in place, but it is unclear how much of that agreement came through the formal negotiations and how much through Kissinger's backchannel with Dobrynin (491-93). On May 20, Nixon and Kosygin made joint announcements about the tentative agreements and the expectation of future treaties.

From there, work turned to the details of an ABM treaty and a freeze on large offensive systems. The Americans were now particularly concerned with retaining some ABM

capability to protect ICBM sites, and were thus willing to agree to a balanced ABM treaty based on Soviet ABM sites around Moscow (524-26). American officials continued to focus on limiting the emergence of new Soviet ICBM and Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBM) systems, and so were willing to limit their own ICBM and SLBM forces if they could halt or limit the Soviets' (527-28). The next round of talks in Helsinki through the summer ran on the parallel tracks of offensive and defensive weapons. These talks proceeded relatively smoothly, only disrupted by Nixon's announcement of his upcoming trip to China, which the Soviets feared might bring the United States and China closer together, to the detriment of the USSR (562-63). By the end of the summer, plans were being put into place for a summit meeting between Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev, for the purpose of finalizing the agreements.

However, continued American concerns that the direction of talks was leading to an agreement that would leave the Soviets in a superior position, especially in regard to the number and size of the ICBMs and SLBMs the treaty would allow each side, put a damper on efforts to conclude the talks. The issue was whether to allow the Soviets to take advantage of their more recent building programs, or to force them back to earlier levels. Since the United States would retain numerical advantages in other areas (e.g. bombers), and since the Nixon administration considered it unlikely that Congress would approve any expansion of land-based ICBMs beyond the current ICBM deployment, White House officials were willing to accept some imbalance, so long as it did not undermine the treaties' chances at Senate ratification (619). Thus, the door was open to a summit in May 1972 (the announcement of which in October 1971 angered Smith, who was not informed before the press) (622-23).

Although that summit would eventually take place in May 1972, the two sides had not yet settled all of the SALT issues, including the levels at which they would freeze their warheads, and the mix of weapons that would be involved in that freeze. However, for Nixon and Kissinger, the bigger issue seemed to be achieving some sort of agreement in 1972, so that Nixon could use it for domestic purposes going into the election that November. As a result, Kissinger, especially through his backchannel with Dobrynin, largely acquiesced to the Soviet position on numbers of nuclear launchers, including SLBMs, where the Soviets could build upon a decided advantage. As Raymond Garthoff has noted, Kissinger not only misunderstood the advantage he was yielding to the Soviets, he actively presented the agreement as a Soviet proposal that the United States had to accept for the benefit of the treaty, even when much of the proposal was his own.[2]

Before the summit took place, however, Kissinger undertook a secret mission to Moscow to work towards finalizing an agreement directly with Brezhnev. These discussions resulted in tentative agreements on issues of ABM placement and SLBM levels that did not necessarily align with the official negotiating team’s position, and which caused tensions between the team in Helsinki and the White House. Still, when the May 1972 summit came around, the White House believed that it was close to a final SALT agreement, even if it was

[2] Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 179-92.

not perfect (812). After some final negotiations both in Moscow and Helsinki, Nixon and Brezhnev signed the tentative agreements on 26 May.

The documents in the volume give an in-depth and interesting picture of the negotiations and the discussions in Washington behind them. The editors have done well to put together a narrative that demonstrates the various and interweaving elements of the negotiations, particularly the ABM, MIRV, and SLBM issues that so tangled the policies. At times it can be difficult to follow along these different tracks, but that most often has more to do with the vagueness of the actual discussions or the complexity of the issues involved, which regularly confused the players themselves. Still, at times it does seem that more context from the editors might be useful, either in separate editorial notes or in footnotes to the documents.

Some issues come to particular light through the volume. One of the most obvious is the tension between the White House and the negotiating team, made up mainly of State Department and Arms Control and Disarmament Agency officials. While Smith and his team went into the talks with what seems to be a genuine goal of limiting or even halting the arms race (most notable in his “Stop Where We Are” proposal on MIRVs), Nixon and Kissinger tended to be more concerned with the political aspects of a treaty, both in the domestic and the international spheres. Domestically, Nixon wanted SALT as a sign of his ability to be a peacemaker, especially as the talks wore on and the 1972 election approached (469-70). Internationally, Nixon and Kissinger hoped to use SALT as part of a larger campaign of linkage between Cold War issues, including Vietnam, Soviet-American relations, and Sino-American relations (428-29). While the former shows up more explicitly in the volume – especially in recorded conversations in the Oval Office – the latter does hang over much of the policy Nixon and Kissinger tried to pursue through SALT.

Similarly, the volume confirms much of the procedural conflict between the White House and Smith’s team. The centerpiece of this conflict was Kissinger’s backchannel negotiations with Soviet officials, usually Ambassador Dobrynin, culminating in his secret negotiations in Moscow in April 1972. Contrasting the memoranda from the many conversations Kissinger had with Dobrynin with the reports from Smith on the progress of negotiations shows clearly how often the U.S. negotiating positions diverged, and could even work at cross purposes. Most notably, Kissinger’s proposals seemed to undermine much of the work Smith was doing in Vienna and Helsinki, for instance the wording that Kissinger worked out on the tentative agreements in autumn 1971, which Smith called "loose" and "imprecise" (492-93).

The volume also shows how weak Smith’s position was within the administration, despite his importance to the SALT process. Nixon and Kissinger were determined to ensure that the White House got the credit for any agreement that came out of the talks, rather than Smith getting credit for his work in Vienna and Helsinki (477, 784). Beyond those political issues, Smith seemed to carry little bureaucratic weight with anyone in the White House, and there is far more criticism of Smith’s apparent weakness in negotiating than there is praise for his work. Nixon’s appraisal of his chief negotiator as an “asshole” who was soft in the negotiations is negative indeed (473, 798). Reading through the documents, it is little

wonder that Nixon and Kissinger largely sidelined Smith from the story of the negotiations, both at the time and in later memoirs.

One area that the volume seems to somewhat neglect is the role of American allies in the process. Since the negotiations were strictly bilateral between the United States and Soviet Union, this exclusion is not critical to the understanding of the material. At the same time, however, the results of SALT would clearly affect the NATO allies, and so they did have some interest in the proceedings. This interest was particularly apparent, for example, with Britain and France on the issue of SLBMs, since both those allies had SLBM capabilities, and the Soviets insisted in including their arsenals in the SLBM calculations. Yet outside of a few references to informing the North Atlantic Council and exchanges like the one between Nixon and West German Chancellor Willy Brandt – in which Brandt wordlessly mutters agreement to Nixon's briefing on SALT issues (512-13) – the allies and their voices rarely appear. Undoubtedly, there is not much room within an already dense volume for much more material, and it is quite possible that very little such material exists, but some memoranda of conversation with European leaders or ambassadors on SALT issues would have been further illuminating on the place of SALT within the larger Cold War.

Some questions regarding the choice of documents come up at times as well. The editors have clearly made a choice to focus on the policymaking side of the SALT process, particularly on Nixon and Kissinger's roles.[3] While this is illuminating in its own right, especially with regards to Kissinger's backchannel efforts with the Soviets, it can leave the researcher with a less than clear picture of the negotiations themselves. No doubt it would have been impossible for the editors to have included most of the negotiating material, nor would that have done much to clear up the narrative of the process. But it might well have been useful to include more material from the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, in order to provide a different perspective than that of the White House and the State Department, and open another window to the SALT negotiations and the larger panorama of the process. Yet that is not to take away from the job the editors have done in selecting documents to highlight the issues particular to SALT, and they provide clear reference to relevant documents in other FRUS volumes to cover many of the omissions.

With arms control issues still very much relevant in the present day, and questions about nuclear proliferation still resounding in current events, examinations of the history of Cold War arms control have a large part to play in the historiography of recent American foreign policy. The relative lack of studies on the SALT policies and processes in that historiography becomes even more apparent when reading through the documents in this FRUS volume, and scholars should be encouraged to fill the gap. Fortunately for them, they now have a valuable resource and starting point, one that will go a long way towards helping them craft an understanding of this vital issue of international relations.

[3] For a deeper discussion of the editorial choices, see the panel held on 2 February 2012 on *Foreign Relations of the United States Series: SALT I, 1969–1972* conducted at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. http://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/foreign-relations-the-united-states-series-salt-i-1969-1972. Accessed on 23 February 2012.

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